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**Citation for published version:**

Thorburn, M 2018, 'Social democracy, economic liberalism and physical education: A Dewey-informed review of philosophical and pedagogical possibilities', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, pp. 1-22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1513421>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1080/14681366.2018.1513421](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1513421)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

*Pedagogy, Culture and Society*

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* on 06 Sep 2018, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14681366.2018.1513421>.

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## **Social democracy, economic liberalism and physical education: a Dewey-informed review of philosophical and pedagogical possibilities**

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# **Social democracy, economic liberalism and physical education: a Dewey-informed review of philosophical and pedagogical possibilities**

## **Abstract**

This historical-themed critical paper utilises selective education writings by John Dewey to review how constructions of participatory social democracy might benefit conceptions of contemporary physical education which are informed by social interaction and personally relevant learning. After defining the boundaries of enquiry, the review focuses on Dewey's early ethics writings which considered that society functioned best when collective moral purposes merged with individual freedoms in a context where one should be alert to the marginalising influences of laissez-faire liberalism. The paper then briefly reviews why previous attempts to engage with Dewey's theorizing in the United States of America in the early to mid-twentieth century failed to result in sustained progress. Using this analysis, the paper then reviews whether a greater interest in meaningful and activist forms of participation could be enhanced further by establishing clearer Deweyan-informed links to democracy and learning. In conclusion, it is argued that physical education is best equipped to withstand the ramifications of advanced capitalism if students experiences are continuous and interactive, and with a degree of responsibility and control over the pace and direction of learning. If effective, this is likely to develop improved levels of reasoning, active deliberation and decision-making.

**Key words:** John Dewey, social democracy, economic liberalism, physical education, learning, social interaction, philosophy of education, pedagogy

## **Introduction**

In a literature review of the nature and meaning of physical education and youth sport over the past 50 years, Benxi, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2017) adopt a five-fold strategy for discussion which focusses on social interaction, fun, challenge/competition, motor competence and personally relevant learning. The review provides general evidence on the multiple benefits of offering movement-informed experiences to students as well as identifying gaps where future research might be beneficial. Within the detail of these discussions, I was buoyed by the prominence afforded to social interaction and personally relevant learning. For while I am inclined to consider that many of the complexities of fun, challenge/competition and motor competence have been reasonably scoped out in related literature, see, for example, Garn and Cothran (2006), Lopes, Stodden and Rodrigues, (2017), Bernstein, Phillips and Silverman

(2011), I am much more circumspect on whether the quality and detail of investigations on social interaction and personally relevant learning has reached such an elevated position.

These are important matters to currently consider, in part, because the rise in neoliberal reforms across the Anglophone world are often designed to introduce greater choice and achieve better outcomes through educational programmes that are increasingly selective and ever more personalised. The choice-related possibilities of advanced capitalism has largely resulted in a gloomy sense of foreboding in physical education, on the expectation that greater economic liberalism will lead to widening inequalities and fewer opportunities for certain marginalised groups of students (Evans & Davies, 2015). If this is correct, physical educationalists needs to provide convincing counter rationales to programme arrangements where, for example, increased choice exists for some students and where outsourced initiatives hinder the development of teacher-student relationships. In this regard, Benxi et al.'s, (2017) reporting on social interaction through reviewing students' views, teachers' pedagogical practices and associated concerns such as working with peers, group composition and gender equality is helpful. Likewise, for personally relevant learning, reviewing matters such as teacher-student consultation, task ownership and connections between physical education and sporting opportunities in the wider community are welcome. Engaging with these types of challenges matches to a high degree, aspects of the activist agenda reported by Kirk, Lamb, Oliver et al (2018), where curriculum spaces were reconstructed by teachers and female students in ways which enabled alternative practices and agency relationships to be explored.

However, what is underrepresented at present is sufficient engagement with philosophy of education concerns about how versions of physical education can merge the personal search for meaning with a commitment towards social integration and meeting societal needs. As Pope (2014, p. 961) notes in a physical education context if ‘learning plays such a crucial role within our research umbra, where are the studies and publications framed around the works of Dewey, Bruner or Vygotsky?’ This criticism exists despite the gains which can be gleaned from Standal and Aggerholm (2016) who cite the general usefulness of John Dewey’s emphasis on how as experiences proliferate, students’ thoughts and feelings can become part of a repertoire of flexible and sensitised habits. In this context, movement experiences can reveal evidence of independent thought, critical enquiry, observation, foresight and sympathy for others. It also exists despite Ní Chróinín, Fletcher & O’Sullivan (2015) having constructed and validated a framework of pedagogies which can support teachers understanding of how best to cultivate meaningful movement-informed experiences for students in physical education.

The focus in this paper is on engaging with the theorising of John Dewey (1859-1952), as for Dewey participatory social democracy was one of the major goals of society and a key function of education. Moreover, as Gordon (2016, p. 1077) notes, returning to reconsider Dewey reminds us that ‘Dewey’s vision of democracy challenges us to recreate our global communities and our systems of education to meet the changing circumstances of history in such a way that all citizens (not just the wealthy or the powerful) can benefit.’ Furthermore, while movement cultures and sport are never used as the context for argumentation to the same extent that Dewey used politics, the economy and education, movement cultures and sport are nevertheless threaded

across aspects of Dewey's work which focus on democratic meaning and learning in reconstructed social spaces (Jaitner, 2016).

The paper proceeds via engagement with selected writings, most notably some of Dewey's early works e.g. *The Ethics of Democracy* (Dewey, 1888/1969), *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (Dewey, 1891/1969); works which later informed more familiar elaborations of *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916/1980) and *Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1938). The paper also recognises that reconstructing aspects of Deweyan thinking can be difficult as Dewey's work is often opaque and key ideas e.g., on removing dualisms between the mind and the body, may not necessarily be achievable in the way Dewey estimates. Thus, there is a need for some caution in appraising how Dewey's views can support re-conceptualizations of physical education.

**Moreover, the views of Dewey with regard to future philosophical and pedagogical possibilities for physical education, focuses for the most part on education in the public (state) school system for high school students (11-18 years).** These conditions

notwithstanding, the paper reviews three major areas of interest, namely:

- Dewey, social theory and participatory social democracy
- Dewey, social democracy and physical education
- Dewey and philosophical and pedagogical possibilities for physical education

### **Dewey, social theory and participatory social democracy**

In recent years there has been an upsurge in interest in pragmatist philosophy and the collected works of John Dewey, especially his focus on participatory social democracy (Fesmire, 2015; Westbrook, 2005). From the outset, Dewey considered participatory democracy as the ideal form

of social organisation, as ‘the individual and society are organic to each other’ (Dewey, 1888/1969, p. 237). Thus, as Benson, Harkavy and Puckett (2007, p. xii) attest, ‘participatory democracy *is* (original emphasis retained) the form of human society that would best enable all human beings to lead long, healthy, active, peaceful, virtuous, happy lives.’ Dewey’s efforts to advance the cause of participatory democracy were based on building communities that enabled each individual to realise their full capacities. In this light, Fesmire (2015) considers that Dewey’s work considerably predates the contemporary theorising of Nussbaum (2011) whose work is increasingly used in education as a conceptual device for merging the subjective experiences of students (capabilities) with the objective expectation of societies (functionings), see for example MacAllister (2017).

Dewey’s views on *Ethics of Democracy* (Dewey, 1888/1969) were more radical than merely widening access and preserving stability, as the perceived benefit of democracy lay in its potential to contain variegated ethical associations, where freedom can enable individuals to make the most of themselves as social beings. Dewey’s social thinking was predicated on the belief that society functioned best when collective moral purposes merged with individual freedoms in a context where one should be alert to the constraining limitations of laissez-faire liberalism, where power in the hands of relatively few people can be corrosive. So, if ‘society can be truly described as organic, the citizen is a member of the organism, and, just in proportion to the perfection of the organism, has concentrated within himself its intelligence and will’ (Dewey, 1888/1969, p. 235). On this basis, democracy (as opposed to mere sovereignty) can take place within a social organisation where ‘the governors and the governed are not two classes, but two aspects of the same fact – the fact of the possession by society of a unified and articulate

will' (Dewey, 1888/1969, p. 237). Thus, for Dewey, democracy was an ethical conception and a form of government through its moral and spiritual associations (Dewey, 1888/1969). Informed by Plato's writing in the *Republic* (Plato, 381BC/2017), Dewey's idea of democracy was an ambitious one, for as well as aiming to provide social stability (the means) it also defined self-realisation and a positive sense of community as an end (Dewey, 1927/1954). As a consequence for Dewey, democracy was as much about shared ethical meanings as it was about reaching a stable and organised consensus. Accordingly, in later writings such as *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916/1980), Dewey came to consider education as a reconstructive process in which schools can encourage children to review their cognitive and moral capacities and to mutually reaffirm the benefits of democracy (Martin, 2017). As such, part of the appeal for educationalists is that Dewey's experiential approach to learning and life can become pivotal to social reconstruction. This is predicated on Dewey's belief that humans have plural qualities which means they are capable of changing their outlook on a host of intellectual and moral matters, especially when attending schools where education is premised on self-discipline, empathy, open enquiry and personal growth, and where learning liberates students to be happy and socially useful (Fesmire, 2015).

As such, the view of positive freedom taken forward in *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics* (Dewey, 1891/1969) is less socially conservative than one might assume. For as Westbrook (1991) notes, functioning was considered by Dewey as a normative concept where 'the relationship between individual capacities and environments was one of *mutual* (original emphasis retained) adjustment, not a matter of one-sided accommodation of individual needs and powers to a fixed environment' (p. 43). This transformative rather than reproductive view



requires that matters of conflict and dissent need active consideration, as for Dewey dissent is a form of scepticism which challenges the status quo and is in itself a form of participation. Thus, the relationship between individuals and their communities does not necessarily require conformity even though individuals and communities might be seeking very similar ends. From a laissez-faire liberalism perspective, Deweyan thinking might be seen as a form of social engineering, even though for Dewey (1891/1969) the intention was for all people to live the fullest life possible as ‘what is really good for me *must* (original emphasis retained) turn out good for all, or else there is no good in the world at all’ (p. 320).

### **Dewey, social democracy and physical education**

The clearest elaboration of Dewey’s views of self-realisation, experiential learning and sense of community is evident in his school-based educational writings around the turn of the twentieth century. During a period when the emphasis in schooling in the United States of America (USA) shifted from serving rural and agricultural communities to revitalizing education in new industrial towns and cities, Dewey was prolific in arguing for the benefits of a properly constructed progressive education (Dewey, 1896/1973; 1897/1973; 1899/2008). Though reluctant to document those subjects which merit curriculum time and prominence, the ethical conception of worthwhileness which Dewey adopted, was one where there is a premium of learning contexts that foster democratically-infused moral and cultural attitudes. For Dewey (1916/1980, p. 87) ‘democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living’ which rests on the common good, shared interests and an appreciation of contrasting viewpoints. Consequently, Dewey’s pedagogical intentions were informed by the part the teacher plays in stimulating enquiry, constructing group dialogue and encouraging

children to take on greater responsibility for their learning in individual and shared decision-making contexts that help them improve their skills in exercising agency (Dewey, 1916/1980). Thus, making progress requires outcomes (ends) where children ‘recognize they have something at stake, and which cannot be carried through without reflection and use of judgement to select material of observation and recollection’ (Dewey, 1916/1980, p. 139).

If successful in a physical education context, learning would be evident by how decisions on personally relevant learning and social interaction engage students in developing new ideas and in thinking about the world in ways which were previously beyond their grasp. Making progress however not only requires engaging with Dewey’s conceptual ideas but with examples of Dewey’s ideas being put into practice in the past. In this light, two examples from the early to mid-twentieth century in the USA, which highlight the challenges of achieving authentic learning gains and of sustaining progress over time in physical education are reviewed.

### ***The Gary Schools Plan***

While at the University of Chicago, Dewey began a Laboratory School for testing new pedagogical ideas. This and most other progressive school examples, Dewey drew upon in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980) relied on private funding, favourable staff/pupil numbers and generous facilities (Cremin, 1961). By contrast, the Gary Schools Plan was very different, both in terms of size (1000 students by 1908 and 3000 students by 1911) and through being part of public education. During the thirty-year tenure of William Wirt, the first superintendent of schools in Gary (1907-1938), the Gary Schools nurtured the idea of the school as an embryonic community which reflected the occupations of life and which also

provided extended opportunities for students to learn not only in classrooms but in playgrounds and gardens, gymnasiums and swimming pools (Bourne 1916/1970). The Gary Schools became world famous through their integrated focus on work, play and study (Reese, 2013), with many teachers and social reformers, nationally and internationally visiting the schools (Levine & Levine, 1970). In June 1914, Evelyn Dewey (John Dewey's daughter) spent two days at the Gary Schools and drew upon these experiences in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980). In addition, following more detailed and lengthy observations in 1916, Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) completed evaluations of the Gary Schools Plan, with one of seven specialist reports being on 'Physical Training and Play' (Hammer, 1918).

In a previous paper, I appraised the writings of John Dewey in relation to how physical education was organised in the Gary Schools (Author, 2017) and found disconnections between Dewey & Dewey's (1915/1980) reporting and that of Hammer (1918). Part of the problem was due to the thinness of the observation-based reporting from Evelyn Dewey who completed the descriptive chapters in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Fallace & Fantozzi, 2015). By contrast, the theoretical chapters in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980) by John Dewey were more elaborate on the benefits of fully connecting physical and mental growth as the object of learning. For example, John Dewey states:

... physical growth is not identical with mental growth but the two coincide in time, and normally the latter is impossible without the former. If we have reference for childhood, our first specific rule is to make sure of a healthy bodily development. Even apart from its intrinsic value as a source of efficient action and of happiness, the proper development of the mind directly depends upon the proper use of the muscles and the senses. (Dewey & Dewey, 1915/1980, p. 214)

As Westbrook (1991, p. 181) attests, first hand observations by John Dewey of the Gary Schools Plan, ‘might have led to a more critical perspective on Wirt’s handiwork’. Thus, while the Gary Schools emphasized the education of the whole child, in practice, ‘the execution of the plan falls too far behind the conception and intention’ (Hammer, 1918, p. 35). Hammer (1918) found that in the case of physical education, despite its high amount of curriculum time for younger students in particular, that teachers tended to unduly focus on the most able students with teaching being more exclusive than inclusive, and with limited priority afforded to children’s interest and activity choice and with excessive time being afforded to free play. Compounding these problems was poor subject organisation with the fifteen physical education teachers tending to work quite independently of each other with the overall supervisor finding it difficult to standardise instruction.

These theory-practice mismatch difficulties highlight the tensions there can be in reconstructing the school as a miniature community, where the child’s emerging individuality is a key constituent of enriching the social community. It also indicates the tensions there were at the time between administrative progressives and pedagogical progressives, where Labaree (2005) considers that what came to characterise the development of the Gary Schools Plan in the later years of Wirt’s tenure as superintendent was a predominant focus on administrative progressivism rather than pedagogical progressivism. **This was evident through a focus on utilitarian efficiency and organisation over a more differentiated and nuanced method of pedagogical innovation which was informed by students’ individualised social and intellectual growth. As Labaree (2005. p. 288) notes, the result of the administrative**

**progressivism emphasis ‘was a system of schooling that was tilted heavily in the direction of social efficiency rather than engaged learning, differentiation of school subjects rather than broad access to knowledge, and social reproduction rather than social opportunity’.**

### ***The New Physical Education***

More promising initially than the modest field observations endorsing Deweyan claims about the merits of the Gary Schools Plan was the development in the USA of *The New Physical Education*. Through extended references to *How We Think* (Dewey, 1910), *Interest and Effort in Education* (Dewey, 1913/1969) and *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Dewey, 1920/1957), though perhaps surprisingly not *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916/1980), Wood & Cassidy (1927) sought to broaden the scope of physical education in educational practice and to demonstrate how the closer integration of physical, intellectual and moral learning could dovetail with the growth of democratic ideals and new industrial life. Reflecting, Dewey’s views on individual growth in relation to social life and learning through problem solving activities, Wood & Cassidy’s (1927, p. 58) belief was that ‘intellectual activity belongs to the very nature of natural physical education’ and that pedagogically ‘intellectual elements ... can be developed by putting the child into thought-provoking situations’ (p. 58). This required learning environments where students expressed ideas, emotions and feelings and where a broadening out of activity-based experiences correlated with other activities in the school and further afield (Wood, 1910). In this way, a philosophy of life could find expression in education and ‘be consistent with the changes and alterations in the social life of the time’ (Wood & Cassidy, 1927, p. 27). This perspective led to a Deweyan-informed view of physical education flourishing until the increased requirements of post-World War II industrialisation impacted on curriculum design. **Ennis,**

**(2006) notes that the emerging criticism of national fitness and its impact on employment suitability was a factor in the upsurge of interest in physical education related developments in fitness activities and objective measures of fitness. Ennis (2006, p. 47) also notes that in December 1960, President John F. Kennedy ‘weighed in on the concerns of a unfit nation in a *Sports Illustrated* article titled ‘Soft American’.’ Thus, in ways similar to the Gary Schools Plan some years’ earlier, administrative progressivism and its focus on social efficiency were again trumping the pedagogical progressivist emphasis on liberal education.**

In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that from the 1950s until the turn of the twentieth century, Dewey’s theorising fell out of favour due to concerns that in tough economic times a more instrumental approach to education was needed (Fesmire, 2015). In physical education, some authors such as Jewett (1980), continued to explore how curriculum structures could be theoretically informed by a purpose-process model based on personal meaning. However, these types of programmes have tended to be overtaken until recent times by models-based practices centring on better games teaching, improving students’ sense of personal and social responsibility, and sport education. Whether these models are sufficiently bold in promoting democratically-infused learning and achievement or whether these models need recalibrated and updated in order to make more of the curriculum spaces available is a moot point for physical educationalists to review.

More specifically however, the failure of the Gary Schools Plan and the New Physical Education to maintain their initial progress, highlights the difficulties of sustaining social interaction and

personal growth at a time when subject centered teaching and the preservation of elites (administrative progressivism) has frequently overtaken efforts to improve the conditions of the poor and disadvantaged (pedagogical progressivism). As, Whipple (2005) outlines, such problems are not unexpected, as social theorists continue to contest whether a modern vision of fairness is compatible with competitive industrial societies, where participatory democracy ‘is often regarded as theoretically, and even more so, empirically unviable in the midst of the growing complexity and bureaucratic rationalism of advance capitalist society’ (p. 157). That said Whipple (2005) considers that the social reform agenda advanced by Dewey, based on notions of reflective agency which emphasise active participation as well as conflict and dissent, can help improve modern communications to the extent that people are consumers rather than users of knowledge. Therefore, the implication for physical education is to try to present itself as a more representative expression of civic participation. With this ambition in mind, the remainder of the paper focuses on reviewing the extent to which physical education can become underpinned by clearer and more plausible philosophical thinking, and in pedagogical terms of whether sufficient risk can be taken when planning to extend participation. Making progress on this basis should help in reviewing whether physical education can help students to engage with a democratic way of life that contains free and full interactions between social groups and which is supported by varied mutual interests that are both ‘useful and liberal at the same time’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 142).

### **Dewey and philosophical and pedagogical possibilities for physical education**

Contemporary accounts of economic liberalism in education highlight that across much of the Anglophone world, selecting schools according to subject focus, faith, gender and ability is the

main device used to offer choice to parents (Courtney, 2016). This, when coupled with setting up tighter performative/accountability cultures which teachers must work within, is designed to merge increased choice with the raising of standards. **As Evans and Davis (2015) noted earlier this context might prove marginalising and disadvantageous for many students in physical education. How then in such circumstances might Dewey's thinking on participatory social democracy benefit physical education and make good on the subjects most cherished goal i.e. of physical education positively benefiting active lifelong participation (Kirk, 2013).**

Accordingly, how could a fuller engagement with selected Deweyan writings benefit social interaction and personally relevant learning in a context where physical education promotes itself as a worthwhile individual and societal endeavour, which is worthy of curriculum time under the choice-driven and increasingly diverse schooling arrangements which now apply in many parts of the Anglophone world **(if not necessarily in similar countries in continental Europe, Scandinavia, Australasia and the parts of the Americas)**. Furthermore, how could teachers' retain and exercise their professional autonomy **for what they teach and how they teach** at a time when so much choice and control resides with parents.

The position advanced in this paper is that physical educationalists should consider how Deweyan notions of experience can be taken forward relative to the broader aims of schools in a context which recognises the more variegated arrangements which now govern education. Building on earlier thinking on how the goods of practice in physical education could merge with the diverse aims and intentions informing the culture and ethos in schools (Author and Co-author, 2017), following Dewey would involve ensuring that students' engagement and activism in learning were suitably to the fore in planning discussions about how best to cultivate habits



and values relative to their wider goals and ambitions. **In this light, learning would comprise greater individual and collaborative (group) decision making freedoms with students experiences being continuous and interactive with a degree of responsibility and some control over the pace and direction of learning being afforded to them in order to develop improved levels of reasoning, active deliberation, discernment, and decision-making.**

Accordingly, helping teachers to comprehend gradations of student interest might help them to seek out new ways of engaging with students, as evident by the type of questions asked, the ways tasks are described, and the connections which are made between areas of shared interest e.g. learning in school and beyond school (Dewey, 1896, 1913). Progress in these types of ways could help overtake concerns that the often obligatory nature of students' involvements in physical education can make it difficult to measure in authentic terms degrees of engagement and levels of programme impact.

**These types of development it is argued could benefit the experiences of those who have previously often found physical education a marginalising context for personally relevant learning and for fostering social interaction due among other factors to a plethora of racial, gender and disability concerns. Thus a form of expressive physical education which enables more students to explore their emotional responses to learning should also offer more enhanced opportunities for cooperative activity. Author and Co-author (2017) offer a contemporary dance-related example of how democratically-informed conversations on poise, precision, projection, relationships, the uses of space, feeling, mood, and ideas on music, costume and lighting could collectively enhance meaningful learning and a shared sense of purpose. This pedagogical example would especially benefit from being**

**accompanied by teaching practices which enabled extended opportunities for learners to exercise reflection and deliberation in relatively autonomous ways which are characterised by a focus on improving the quality of teaching for learners which is underpinned by a growth mind set and which encourages collaboration between schools.**

In all of this however it may be that the ramifications of advanced capitalism are so pronounced that the incremental gains of physical education and associated programmes designed to boost participation are overtaken by economic-informed attempts to improve efficiency and value for money? In contexts, where this happens, the basis for reinvigorating physical education needs to be driven by student and parental endorsement as well as by teachers' pedagogical practices and educational stakeholders' policy commitments. **By way of example and admittedly from the context within one country alone (England)** there is recent evidence that this might not be as unachievable as perhaps anticipated. For example, in a letter to the Chair of the Youth Sport Trust (**a sport for development charity organisation**) in October 2010, the then Education Secretary **for the United Kingdom Government**, Michael Gove, announced that the Coalition Government was lifting the requirements of the previous Government's Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People and ending the guaranteed funding for School Sport Partnerships in England (Foster, 2015). This was on the basis that the existing network of school sport partnerships was considered neither affordable nor the best way to help schools achieve their potential in improving competitive sport. Instead, it would be left to individual schools to decide whether they wished to maintain current levels of provision for physical education and sport. The decision to dismantle the partnerships proved controversial and in December 2010 it was to the delight of various politicians, policy stakeholders and teachers when continued

Government funding for a more decentralised version of School Sport Partnerships was announced. A key point in this brief example is that the national level complaints by politicians, policy stakeholders and teachers were fuelled by local concerns from students, parents and local volunteers. This applied example reflects Pappas's (2008) summarising of Dewey's ethics in regard to education and democracy, where he notes that organisations are working against democracy when they take top-down decisions without listening to those closest to the situation. As such, it is important that democratic reform must be inclusive and emerge 'from within the relationships that are most local, personal, spontaneous, voluntary and direct' (Pappas, 2008, p. 306). Thus, with an eye to the future, physical educationalists should be increasingly minded to consider in ever more profound ways the transformative and reconstructive possibilities of generating increased student and parental support for their programmes.

## **Conclusion**

With a focus on social interaction and personally relevant learning in particular, this historically-themed critical paper has raised some demanding questions about the extent to which some of Dewey's main curriculum planning and pedagogical ideas have relevance and traction for the purposes and teaching of contemporary physical education. In taking forward, this remit, the paper has tried to overtake Boostrom's (2016) concern that Dewey is more cited than read with references adding little more than a decorative flourish to proceedings. The reappraisal of the Gary Schools and New Physical Education plans from the early to mid-twentieth century revealed that neither initiative could withstand the ramifications of economic liberalism. Given the policy prominence of physical education and its associated links with health and wellbeing and competitive sport agendas, it is argued that if physical education is serious about closer

integration with education in a context where the school is a miniature community which can foster individuality and cultivate participatory social democracy, that two areas of further research are required. These are for physical education to be theoretically underpinned by greater and more coherent connections with the work of John Dewey and thereafter to contain as necessary a more radical edge which more assuredly outlines how physical education can contribute towards school-based forms of participatory democracy. This is most likely to occur if physical education can avoid the shackles of constraint and recast itself as a subject, which is underpinned by more activist approaches to learning and teaching.

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